

A generally pleasant down and up!



■ By Stephen Ryan, General Manager ACFA

THERE have been two surprising and mostly pleasant factors affecting the sugarcane business in the past month. While the unexpected rain fell heavily, the sugar price rose suddenly.

The Bureau of Meteorology had not predicted significant rainfall until late in the first quarter of 2020, so it was a nice surprise to receive a drenching, as many sugar areas were parched, and the spring storms were three months late. Soybean crops had another swimming lesson and while some have held on, those which have been lost will be left fallow or will be sown later-on to winter legumes.

QSL's Standard Advance rate for the 2019 Season will increase to 82.5 per cent from February 19, 2020. Based on indicative pool values as of January 31, 2020, this equates to a \$16 per tonne increase to the Standard QSL default Advance payment, bringing it to \$332 per tonne IPS.

The biennial Next Gen Case IH Step UP! 2020 conference will be on March 24-25 at the Bundaberg Multiplex. We hope to see you there.

First mainland detection of fall armyworm

The invasive moth pest fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) was found on Australia's mainland for the first time in February and, as we go to press, more have been detected on farms across Far North Queensland.

On February 19, Biosecurity Queensland General Manager Plant Biosecurity and Product Integrity Mike Ashton said a suspect moth collected at Bamaga was tested by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and was confirmed to be fall armyworm.

"This detection follows recent confirmed detections on two Torres Strait Islands, Erub and Saibai and underlines how quickly this pest can spread," Mike said.

"Biosecurity Queensland has proposed a response plan that is being considered by the national Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests.

"Surveillance for fall armyworm will commence on the Atherton Tablelands, wet tropics, Port Douglas, Mossman and Cairns regions this week."

Mike said fall armyworm was an invasive moth pest that feeds in large numbers on more than 350 plant species.

"Fall armyworm causes major damage to economically important cultivated grasses such as maize, rice, sorghum, sugarcane and wheat, and also to other horticultural crops and cotton," Mike said.

"They are most active during late summer and early autumn months but may be active year-round in tropical areas.

"Growers should have on-farm biosecurity measures in place to protect their crops from pests and diseases."

Mike said fall armyworm larvae were light coloured with a larger darker head.

"As they develop, they become browner with white lengthwise stripes and also develop dark spots with spines," Mike said.

"Adult moths are 32 to 40 mm in length wing tip to wing tip, with a brown or grey forewing and a white hind wing.

"Male fall armyworm adults have more patterns and a distinct white spot on each of their forewings.



Fall armyworm larvae.



Male fall armyworm adult.

“The community, industry and agronomists are encouraged to report any unexpected symptoms in the field by phoning the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.”

2020 sSeason

On February 17, 2020 the ASMC wrote regarding “concerning sugarcane production trends.”

ASMC stated that “the Queensland sugar industry is facing another challenging year in 2020 after suffering significant production declines and low prices during 2019.”

“Australian Sugar Milling Council (ASMC) data has revealed a worrying reduction in both cropping area and sugarcane yield across all regions in 2019, with recovery unlikely in 2020.”

“The total Queensland sugarcane crop for 2019 was 28.4 million tonnes, down 6.7 per cent from the 30.4 million tonnes achieved in 2018 and some six million tonnes less than the 2016 crop of 34.4 million tonnes (-17.4 per cent).”

“The crop area harvested was also down 12,000 hectares across the State’s sugar regions last year,” (350,082 hectares in 2019 compared to 362,414 hectares in 2018).

“The figures also showed that the cane yield in terms of tonnes per hectare in 2019 was lower than the average result for the past eight years across every Queensland sugarcane production region.

“While the lift in the global sugar price and recent widespread rain in most districts has certainly been welcome, in some areas the rain has come too late to deliver any marked improvement in crop tonnages for 2020.”

Let’s hope that the warm weather continues late into Autumn, to give the 2020 crop the best chance to grow-on.

Australian Farm Data Code

On February 18, the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) released the first iteration of the Australian Farm Data Code, in a move designed to help farmers embrace new technologies while maintaining confidence in how their data is used.

The landmark Code is the result of collaborative effort led by the NFF, bringing together agricultural technology providers, researchers, industry experts and farmers.

Chair of the NFF’s Farm Data Working Group, Ms Andrea



Ms Andrea Koch.

Koch, said the Code fills a clear gap in the sector’s data governance arrangements.

“Farmers want to know how the data collected by machinery, satellites and sensors is being used, and who it’s being shared with. They also need to have some control in that process.”

Overseas, similar concerns have led to the establishment of codes of practice which set expectations on how data should be managed.

“Voluntary codes have already emerged in the USA, New Zealand and Europe. Australia has been less advanced when it comes to protecting farmers’ data, but we have used this as an opportunity to learn from what is happening in those other markets.

“In consultation with industry, we’ve now reviewed global best practice to deliver an Australian Code suited to Australia’s agtech ecosystem.”

Andrea said the Code would not rid the sector of poor practices overnight, but was an important step in raising the bar.

“As a voluntary initiative, the Code aims to inform service providers about the standards they should meet in their data policies, and help farmers navigate the complex topic of data use.

“Over time, we’ll explore ways to communicate which providers meet the standard set by the Code, and which fall short,” Andrea explained.

The National Farmers’ Federation believes technology adoption will play a key role in achieving the sector’s goal of \$10 billion in farm gate output by 2030.

“Modelling by the Australian Farm Institute has shown we can add \$20.3 billion to annual farm output by embracing digital technology. It’s an opportunity too big to ignore.

“It’s critical to lay the groundwork so farmers are the beneficiaries of digital disruption – capturing a fair share of the value that new technologies will create.

“The Farm Data Code is a crucial step in that journey,” Andrea concluded.

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Come and hear about protecting farm data and IP at the Next Gen Case IH Step UP! 2020 conference.

KPMG launches blockchain track and trace platform

KPMG Origins is a blockchain-based ‘track and trace’ platform to support industries like agriculture, resources, manufacturing and financial services.

KPMG in Australia, China and Japan have launched KPMG Origins, a blockchain-based ‘track and trace’ platform to support industries including agriculture, resources, manufacturing and financial services.

The platform brings together a number of emerging technologies including blockchain, internet of things sensors (IoT), as well as data and analytics tools to provide transparency and traceability to trading partners across complex industries. KPMG Origins allows these trading partners to communicate unique product information across their supply chains, and in particular to end users, while reducing operational complexities.

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